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FROM CHEESE TO BACKYARD WRESTLING



ALEC HANLEY BEMIS ([HTTPS://WWW.LAWEEKLY.COM/GUEST-AUTHOR/ALEC-HANLEY-BEMIS/](https://www.laweekly.com/guest-author/alec-hanley-bemis/)) ✕ JUNE 5, 2003



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Rick Mahr walks into a built-to-impress bar on the Sunset Strip called Mirabelle. He's wearing designer jeans, a streamlined, beige leather jacket and matching tassel-free loafers. He has a 5 o'clock shadow, more likely a function of a particular grooming philosophy rather than the result of having just rolled out of bed. Mahr is president of Xtreme Entertainment Group, the premier retailer of backyard-wrestling videos and DVDs. For about a month and a half, he's been giving me the runaround. After several foiled attempts to meet him at his office — "We're in Hollywood, the Valley, actually even Beverly Hills," he'd say, imprecisely — he suggested this place. Rick is very tan, very slick, pretty nice and very open to my questions. He is also the kind of guy who tends not to answer those questions, papering over his evasions with enthusiasm and a smile. Some would find him unctuous, but I like him; I think he's honest. His business is business. I ask Rick what motivates the kids he documents. Or, more pointedly, do they get a cut?

"It's very pure," he answers. "It's not guys doing it for a big contract or a big salary. It's one of the few things that isn't so commercialized. These guys are doing it whether it's for one thousand fans or four guys in the back yard. It's just love." He never answers the question about the money.

Mahr came to Los Angeles three years ago with love in his heart, a dream in his head and a master's degree in business administration. "I was a marketing exec at Kraft," he says. "I was in the Chicago and Wisconsin area." He had a good salary and a secure life, but he also had a sideline as "the nation's leading pro-wrestling cartoonist," contributing artwork to an independent magazine called *World of Wrestling*, or *WoW!* One day, a friend gave him this tape . . .

"There's this guy jumping off a 20-foot antenna on the roof of his mom's house," he recalls. "Thirty people are there and they're all cheering. It was pretty raw, but when you sat down to watch it you never got bored. You're getting your action, you're getting your hardcore, you're getting your ultraviolence, and here comes some comedy. I put one and one together and said, 'I think this is something other people would want to see.'" Rick loaded everything he had into a U-Haul truck and drove to Los Angeles. "I went from cheese to backyard wrestling," he notes.

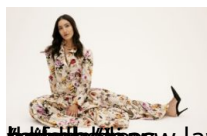
Mahr is on the fifth volume of the "Best of Backyard Wrestling" series — *Crazier Than the Rest* — and his expanded product line includes the "World's Wildest" series — *World's Wildest College Parties*, *World's Wildest Bachelor Parties*, and *World's Wildest Street Fights* (including *Ghetto Brawls* and a female-friendly one called *Brawling Broads*). Rick Mahr has figured something out.

"Maybe back in the day you'd see kids playing baseball in the backyard lot. They wanted to be the next Babe Ruth or whoever. But now they want to be like Stone Cold Steve Austin or The Rock or Mick Foley, because it's a reflection of who the new hero is. There is a huge trend toward individualized activities, from skateboarding on up. It's not necessarily about team-focused sports anymore. And then there's the fact that these kids are growing up on short attention spans for everything. Video games, and crazy kinds of content, and *Jackass*. Backyard wrestling is a reflection of that. It's athletic, but you also get to be this showman. And, if anything, these kids are perfect for theater, for drama. They're overall entertainers, and that's what pro wrestling is. There's a passion these guys have that is unmatched, a *just being into it* quality that comes across. And that's catching. It's a different kind of pastime."

A couple of days later, Mahr sent me an e-mail: "We're frequently described as '*Fight Club* meets *Jackass* meets pro wrestling,' so with an already number one best-selling video series, upcoming video game from the makers of *Tomb Raider*, and over-the-top print magazine in development . . . will a BYW movie be next? God Bless America."

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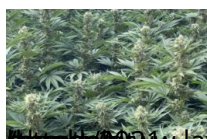
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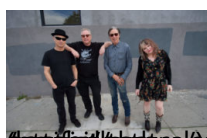
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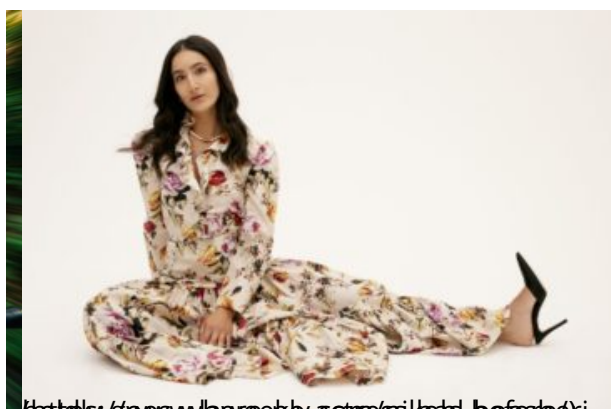
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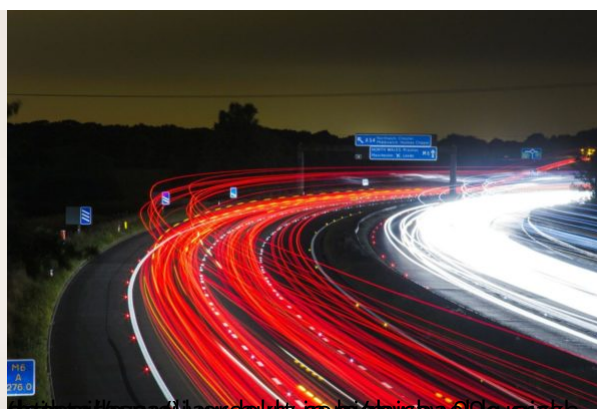
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